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The Office of the Northwest Territories Languages Commissioner

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Cover photo:
NWT Languages Commissioner Fibbie Tatti and Elder Jane Charlie Sr. at the Tl'oondih Healing Society lodge visiting Elders near Fort McPherson, NWT.

Vision

As Elder Leo Norwegian so eloquently said, "like the people before us, we must rise like the water and take our place in the protection of languages and culture for the next generation of people."

Each step forward we have taken in revitalizing languages in the NWT was done with the help of our Elders and of many other dedicated people by working together toward the common vision of strong, healthy NWT official languages. Each of our achievements has only come about because we all shared and worked together toward a vision of strong, healthy official languages in the NWT. The Office of the Languages Commissioner must continue to take this cooperative approach, working with all our language communities and NWT citizens to meet their language needs and aspirations and to uphold the *Official Languages Act*.

Students at Ecole Alain St. Cyr in Yellowknife listen to storytelling by the NWT Languages Commissioner, Fibbie Tatti.

Mission

The Office of the NWT Languages Commissioner meets this Vision by:

- advocating support for NWT official languages development;
- monitoring and researching activities;
- receiving and resolving inquiries and complaints in regard to the NWT *Official Languages Act*;
- consulting with an Advisory Board;
- making reports and recommendations to the Government and Legislative Assembly; and
- communicating with the public.

Message from the Languages Commissioner

It has been a real privilege to work as your Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. I can never thank enough the Elders, the Teaching and Learning Centre staff, the Directors, the Chiefs and the many communities who have supported us over the last four years.

One of the gifts that the Creator bestowed upon us as Aboriginal people is the gift of languages. I firmly believe it is no accident that we are chosen to lead the fight for Aboriginal languages elsewhere.

Along with this vital leadership role comes much responsibility. A very great danger that all our languages face is our own complacency. Too often we are complacent in believing that someone else will take care of our languages' survival. Too often we are complacent in believing someone else will protect our languages for our children and grandchildren. This complacency takes over whenever we sit back and feel we have done enough.

The role of this office is to protect and promote our official languages and to inspire and assist peoples' work in the NWT to revitalize them. The role of this office is to keep the languages together and people's commitment together. In this role, the office has completed the Yamoria Unity Display and Oh, Canada CD, Elders' Policy and Guidelines (for the Aven Centre), and biographies of Elders with the Teaching and Learning Centres. We also continued to put out a newsletter with the assistance of many teachers and language instructors.

All of this work could not have been done without the support and commitment of the Aboriginal leaders.

Our leaders in the NWT recognize the vital need to promote the official languages. One way they support this office is by allowing it to address their regional and community meetings.

The French language community has struggled hard to achieve recognition of their language in the NWT. Their work serves as a model in many ways for the work, which is needed on Dene languages.

The French language community has always had a special relationship with the Dene. In the Dene languages, they are referred to as the 'original white people', because they had the first contact with the Dene and played an important role in our history. The Languages Commissioner's office would like to thank the French-speaking community for its continued support of this office.

The Languages Commissioner's office played a central leading role while the focus has been on the review of languages.

We hear the beauty in our languages all around us. We hear it in the songs that the birds sing. We hear it in the talk of the ravens, in the breeze, in the rainstorms and thunder that roar overhead, and in the trees. These sounds always remind us of our responsibility as Aboriginal people to continue to talk, to continue to add to the songs of this earth.

We are like the animals, who evolve in cycles and replenish themselves every seven years. I believe that languages are much the same. They too, go through periods of replenishment. I honestly believe we have entered such a time right now, a crucial lull period. Many changes are taking place in this land and peoples' priorities lie elsewhere. Soon enough, our Aboriginal languages will become a priority again. Rest and rest again, I say. Then rise like the water.

The spirit and enthusiasm that we all need is captured perfectly in the words of Elder Philip Crapeau, who said, "my one wish was to tell everyone to try to keep your spirit strong and bravely meet the goals you set for yourselves".

Mahsi,

Fibbie Tatti
Languages Commissioner of the NWT

Betty Vittrekwa, William George Firth and Fibbie Tatti at the Teaching and Learning Centre in Fort McPherson.

Advisory Board

The *Official Languages Act* of the NWT requires the Office of the Languages Commissioner (OLC) to maintain close contact with communities. We do this through community visits but more importantly through the activities of the Languages Advisory Board. The function of this Board is to provide strategic direction and leadership on an ongoing basis to this office. The Advisory Board also plays an essential role in maintaining communications among the various language groups in the NWT.

The OLC Advisory Board's last meeting was February 4 to 6, 2003 in Yellowknife. Since then, the Legislative Assembly has cut the budget of the Languages Commissioner's office by $100,000. This has significantly affected the office and its ability to undertake many initiatives it had originally planned. Under the constricted budget we are now operating with, we are unable to hold an Advisory Board meeting for 2004.

At this time, our office would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our Advisory Board members, Elders and translators, for all their contributions, commitment and service to our people.

Objective	Action	Status
Regular annual Advisory Board meetings	Advisory Board meeting held February 4 to 6, 2003	Complete
	Advisory Board meeting for 2004 – cancelled due to budget restraints	Cancelled

History

The first meeting of the Advisory Board to this office was held from October 24 to 26, 2000 with assistance of staff from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

Advisory Board members were chosen carefully through community consultation. In choosing them, efforts were made to ensure:

1. representation of Elders and regional language workers from each of the official language groups;
2. members have lengthy experience in language work;
3. members speak their own languages; and
4. members have specialized language skills, e.g. literacy, interpreting/translation, linguistics, language program development and research.

Board members are highly regarded in their communities. With their collective skills, experience and resourcefulness, they provide expert advice to this office. Support from Divisional Boards of Education has also contributed greatly to successful operation of annual Advisory Board meetings.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner couldn't undertake its mandate without the hard work and commitment of the Advisory Board members. They are the front workers and we continue to be grateful for all their contributions and support

> *It is recommended that the current members of the OLC Advisory Board continue their role on the two new Advisory Boards as identified by the recommendations of the Special Committee on the Review of Languages (SCOL).*

This recommendation has already been identified in a letter from the Office of the Languages Commissioner to the Minister of Education.

Below is a list of Advisory Board membership:

Region	Board Member
Dogrib	Elder Elizabeth Mackenzie, Rae-Edzo Mary Richardson, Rae-Edzo Terry Douglas, Rae-Edzo Rosa Mantla, Rae-Edzo George Mackenzie, Rae-Edzo
Sahtu	Elder Victor Menacho, Tulita Jane Modeste, Deline Albertine Ayah, Deline Camilla Tutcho, Deline Fred Rabesca, Fort Good Hope Jessie Campbell, Norman Wells
French	Danielle Couillard, Yellowknife
Inuvialuktun	Elder Rosie Albert, Inuvik Elder Victor Allen, Inuvik
Innuinaqtun	Emily Kudlak, Holman
South Slave	Elder Sarazine Basil, Lutsel K'e Elder Marcel Norn, Deninu Ku`E J.C. Catholique, Lutsel K'e Anne Biscaye, Deninu Ku`E Georgina Biscaye, Deninu Ku`E Doris Camsell, Hay River

Region	Board Member
Gwich'in	Elder Jane Charlie, Fort McPherson Liza Andre, Tsiigehtchic William Firth, Fort McPherson Betty Vittrekwa, Fort McPherson Eleanor Mitchell-Firth, Fort McPherson
Deh Cho	Elder Adele Hardisty, Fort Wrigley Elder Joe Bonnetrouge, Fort Providence (deceased) Andy Norwegian, Fort Simpson Fanny Swartzentruber, Fort Simpson
Cree	Elder Maggie Kurszewski, Fort Smith Paula Anderson, Fort Smith

Board recommendations to the office regarding the review of the *Official Languages Act* have been published and tabled at the NWT Legislative Assembly. This document is entitled, *Keeping our Minds Strong*.

Mackenzie-Delta MLA David Krukto making a presentation for Mary Effie Snowshoe in Fort McPherson at Chief Julius School gymnasium, honoring Mary Effie's retirement.

Office Structure

The Office of the Languages Commissioner is structured to ensure that it performs key tasks like advocacy, research and monitoring most effectively.

Objective	Action	Status
Office Reorganization	Rewrite current job descriptions to include:	
	• research analyst;	Complete
	• public affairs liaison; and	Complete
	• administrative assistant	Complete
	Hire public affairs liaison	Complete
	Hire research analyst	Complete
	Hire administrative assistant	Complete

Comments

It is crucial for this office to have the capacity to perform functions expected by stakeholders in the NWT, e.g. advocacy, providing contemporary research and resources, promotional programs and communication.

The office is fortunate to have long-time northerner, public affairs liaison, Nancy Gardiner, to implement our ambitious public affairs program. We value Ms. Gardiner's experience in organizing conferences, her communication and organizational skills plus commitment to, and understanding of, language issues.

The research analyst position is critical to the success of this office. This position has remained vacant since the fall of 2003 due to budget cuts by the Legislative Assembly.

The administrative assistant position has been a full-time position and is essential for effective support of this office.

Shannon Gullberg provides legal counsel in resolving complaints and providing legal opinion on issues affecting the office. Ms. Gullberg was instrumental in preparing workshops for review of the Act.

Public Affairs Liaison Nancy Gardiner

Advocacy

This office's Advocacy work serves two purposes: to recognize and encourage groups and/or individuals in their language work; and to encourage people to claim their language rights under the Act with the support of the Office of the Languages Commissioner. The Language Commissioner's visits to various communities are essential to ensure this office understands what is happening in communities. These visits help us to see and hear what the language instructors and Elders want in regards to language retention.

2003-2004

Target	Action	Achieved
Community	Living History Web site Meeting, April, Yellowknife	Attendance and Meeting
	Fort McPherson Elder's Celebration, June, Fort McPherson	Attendance and Presentation
	Midway Cultural Celebration, August, Fort McPherson	Attendance
	NWT Cadets Barbeque, September, Yellowknife	Attendance and Presentation
	Weledeh School Presentation, January, Yellowknife	Attendance and Presentation
	Meetings in Fort McPherson, March, Fort McPherson	Attendance and Meetings
	Honouring of the Chief, March, Rae/Edzo	Attendance
Regional	Dettah Leadership Meeting, May, Dettah	Attendance and Meeting
	Deh Cho First Nations Assembly, June, Kakisa	Attendance and Meeting
	Dene National Assembly, July, Aklavik	Attendance and Meeting
	Dogrib Language Committee Meeting, December, Yellowknife	Attendance and Meeting
	Dogrib Treaty 11 Open house, December, Yellowknife	Attendance
Territorial	Aurora College Graduation Ceremonies, May, Inuvik	Attendance and Presentation
	Office of the Languages Commissioner's Open House, December, Yellowknife	Attendance and Presentation
	Aboriginal Languages Month, March, Yellowknife	Attendance and Presentation
	NWT Native Women's Association Open House, December, Yellowknife (Attendance)	Attendance
	NWT Native Women's General Assembly, March, Yellowknife	Attendance and Presentation

Comments

The Office of the Languages Commissioner makes a variety of presentations to the public, various language organizations, and government officials on the importance of language. The office also invites individuals to speak confidentially about any concerns they may have about their language rights.

A priority for the Languages Commissioner is to support the efforts of communities, groups and individuals in language retention. By retaining our languages, we retain our cultures.

Recently, the uniqueness of our *Official Languages Act* and the part it plays in maintaining Aboriginal languages has been recognized internationally.

The Languages Commissioner's office has also been recognized for its very important role in the support and maintenance of languages. The Languages Commissioner was invited at the international level by the Governor General of Canada and the University of Tokyo to represent Canada at the international functions pertaining to languages. These trips were sponsored by the host organizations. This office deeply appreciates the opportunity to represent Canada and the NWT in this way.

Ms. Menacho-Neyelle at a Dene camp.

Visitors to the Office of the NWT Languages Commissioner for the OLC Open House in December, 2003.

Research

This office seeks to support socio-linguistic research that monitors language trends in the NWT and identifies critical success factors of language development projects. We have collected past studies on the development of official languages in this jurisdiction. This library offers language workers a reference basis and much needed materials for new program development.

Objective	Action	Status
Acquisition of contemporary language research on NWT languages	Works of Wendall White, Karen Rice, Ed Cook, Vic Monus, June Helm, Schott Rushforth, Robert Young, Leslie Saxon, Phil Howard, NWT Teaching and Learning Centers, GNWT Departments and Cultural Associations	Work in progress
Supportive research in the Review of the *Official Languages Act*	2001 Business Plans, Review Process, Socio-linguistic research	Complete and in progress
NWT Case Studies	Family Involvement in French advocacy initiatives;	Work in progress
	Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit Curricula	Review
	Fall Caribou Hunts and documentary by CBC Television	Ongoing
	Researched Yamoreya's journey for OLC Unit Display	Complete
Other Jurisdictions	Study of other jurisdictions and identification of critical success factors in language programs and legislation	Work in progress
	Navaho Language Research Project	Completed
	Study Hawaiian Language Nesting Project	Proposed

Comments

Last year, the Languages Commissioner's message highlighted the language of children. How well children speak is considered to be a prime indicator of the health of a language. Studying the language of children is one of the simplest, most effective ways to review a language's growth or decline.

Aboriginal Head Start programs are the best place to start a 'Children's Language Program'. It is from this basic platform that a concentrated effort to save a language can be launched. Research in the areas of language retention and language growth can be initiated from the Aboriginal Head Start Program. Once again, I would like to emphasize that the starting point for language maintenance and development is the Head Start programs.

Research is critical to the continued success of language development and maintenance. Often, when we do research, we are collecting and exploring and sometimes we are fortunate to experience culture through a language.

In the past 30 years, there has been an incredible amount of research done by all the various regions. Unfortunately, little has been done to preserve this and to save it for future generations. The research includes taping, transcribing, analyzing from animals, land, genealogy, science, topography, plants, medicinal research, spirituality, landmarks, childrearing and history and much, much more. It identifies our role as Dene people and our contribution to this world.

Today, our Elders are continuing on their life's journeys. With that loss goes all the knowledge and history unless it is passed down to the young people.

It is absolutely critical that all this accumulation of research material be housed and kept safe for our future generations.

Archiving artifacts must include a statement and explanation of their history and this must be done in the language, which gave them meaning.

The current precarious nature of our languages in the North leaves us with very definite steps that need to be taken immediately.

It is recommended by the Office of the Languages Commissioner that the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre role be increased and be given the financial resources to be able to carry this important role.

Celebrating at the N'dilo gym.

Gina Dolphus, President of the NWT Native Women's Association.

Celebrating in Fort McPherson.

Monitoring

The function of Monitoring is to provide accountability for language funding.

Objective	Action	Status
Monitor Canada-NWT Agreement for Languages Agreement	Identify allocation of funds, purpose of funds, whether objectives were met and whether departments conducted evaluation.	Work in progress
Monitor Vote 1 (GNWT) Language Funding	Identify allocation of funds, purpose of funds, whether objectives were met and whether departments conducted evaluation.	Work in progress
Public Satisfaction Surveys	Language services in health care	Work in progress
Monitor SCOL Report	Identify the committee's findings and make recommendations to be included in this annual report.	Complete

Comments

Allocations for Vote 1 and Vote 4 Language Funding can be found in Appendix two. The office is committed to ongoing monitoring of activities to ensure that funding is used for its designated purpose.

This has been a year of review for the NWT's *Official Languages Act*. The Languages Commissioner has set aside time and resources to focus on the Special Committee's review of languages.

Appendix three sets out the Languages Commissioner's response to the report of the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act*, which was tabled in the Legislative Assembly in March 2003.

Gwich'in gathering at the N'dilo gym.

Complaints

The function of the office in resolving complaints regarding the *Official Languages Act* is to ensure peoples' language rights are upheld under the Act. In addition, investigating complaints provides an insight into whether problems are localized or system-wide. This type of information allows the office to identify the best corrective measures to take in resolving complaints.

Objective	Action	Status
Simplify Complaint Process	Community Visits	Ongoing/completed
Inform Public of a Complaint Process	Regional Visits	Ongoing
Receive Complaints	Resolve Complaints	Ongoing
Maintain membership with Canadian Ombudsman Association (COA)	Attend COA Annual Meetings	Ongoing

Comments

This office received one new complaint in 2003-2004. The number of complaints received has been reduced largely due to the efforts of this office in meeting with people and being available to the public.

Complaints can encompass all eleven official languages although they have lately related primarily to French and Dene languages. Time taken to resolve complaints can range from under one month to more than one year depending on the complexity of the investigation.

In 2003-2004, the Office of the Languages Commissioner received 168 inquiries, 44 invitations to attend functions or meetings and conducted six Languages Commissioner initiatives. The number of inquiries was down somewhat from the previous year, which saw 203 inquiries and five complaints.

As in previous years, this office wishes to call attention to the need for Interpreting and Translation (I/T) certification. Without this certification, Aboriginal language interpreters are at a great disadvantage and their ability to make a living from I/T work alone is compromised. A number of interpreters must rely on other employment so they can carry out I/T work as a source of secondary work. This limits the availability and quality of service, which in turn limits I/T's from developing their services into viable businesses.

Unlike their French counterparts, whose training is recognized through certification, Aboriginal language interpreters cannot command as high a rate of pay. Also, without certification, it is very difficult for Aboriginal interpreters to set terms of service. For example, French interpreters are able to stipulate that more than one interpreter must be hired for lengthy interpreting contracts, recognizing that simultaneous interpreting is very demanding work.

Given these problems, this office must ask whether the GNWT is providing adequate official language services to NWT citizens. Is the spirit and intent of the Act compromised? Are we safeguarding the very people who hold the gift of our official languages?

Faced with these problems, the office believes there is a pressing need to develop a comprehensive strategy on the certification of I/T's for NWT Aboriginal languages.

The dramatic decrease in complaints can be attributed to the effective work of the Advisory Board. The Board informs communities on many issues concerning language, the Act, language rights and the role of the Office of the Languages Commissioner.

A GNWT department cannot easily deal with many inquiries that are handled by the Office of the Languages Commissioner. Often, they don't have the personnel to deal with these language and cultural inquiries. Furthermore, the Office of the Languages Commissioner has become known for its depth of knowledge and ability to answer most inquiries by internal research in a quick, accurate, professional and efficient manner. This is due largely to the Language Advisory Board members and the many community language workers.

In the last three years, the visibility of official languages in the workforce has been almost non-existent. There have been public statements about the importance of languages. Nearly everyone agrees that more must be done to assist the development, maintenance and support of languages. Within the last year, the Office of the Languages Commissioner's budget has been reduced $100,000. The Legislative Assembly's language budget was $169,000 and was reduced by $100,000. Before it undertakes further downsizing or economizing efforts, this government needs to listen to what communities are saying. Giving prominence to the use of official languages is nowhere more important than in the Legislative Assembly itself. The credibility of the Assembly's own support for these languages is at stake here. As the saying goes 'the value and importance of any project is reflected in its budget'.

It is recommended by the Languages Commissioner of the NWT that the $100,000 be restored to the Legislative Assembly language funding.

Rosie Firth with her grand-daughter in Fort McPherson.

Communications

The function of Communication is to stimulate public awareness of official languages, language development initiatives in the NWT, understanding of public rights under the Act, office roles and responsibilities, and to respond to inquiries made to the office.

Objective	Action	Status
Receive Inquiries	Resolve inquiries	Ongoing
Public Display	Official language and culture display panel	Complete
Press Release	Regarding the Advisory Board and information regarding review of the Act	Complete
	Public display unit	Complete
	Aboriginal language month	Yearly
Web site	Redesign web site	Work in progress
Initiate quarterly newsletter	First newsletter widely distributed and published on the Office web site	Complete and Ongoing
	Fall, Winter, Spring & Summer 2003 newsletter and winter 2004 circulated to 550 organizations and individuals	Complete
Aboriginal Languages Month	NWT-wide TV ads in all official languages during March	Complete
	Newspaper promotional advertisements promoting official languages	Complete
	Information display, Centre Square Mall, Yellowknife	Complete
Attend Public Events		
Community	Living History Web site Meeting, April, Yellowknife	Attend
	Media Roundtable, IABC, October, Yellowknife	Attend
	Communications and the Bottom Line Workshop, November, Yellowknife	Attend
	GNWT Communications Planning Workshop, November, Yellowknife	Attend
	Women In Business IABC, November, Yellowknife	Attend
Regional	Dene Leadership Meeting, May, Dettah	Attend
	Oh Canada CD Launch, Great Hall, May, Yellowknife	Attend
	Ministerial Literacy Awards, Great Hall, June, Yellowknife	Attend
	Cultural Event, June, Fort McPherson	Attend
	Midway Cultural Celebration, August, Fort McPherson	Attend
	Gwich'in Gathering, December, N'Dilo	Attend
	Language Workers Meeting, Museum, December, Yellowknife	Attend
	Dogrib meeting, December, Yellowknife	Attend
	Dogrib Treaty 11 Open House, December, Yellowknife	Attend
	NWT Native Women's Open House, December, Yellowknife	Attend
	Fort McPherson community visit and Elders, March, Fort McPherson	Attend
Territorial	NWT Native Women's President's Dinner, Great Hall, Yellowknife	Attend
	Office of the Languages Commissioner Open House, December, Yellowknife	Organize and Attend
National	Assembly of First Nations leadership meeting, July, Edmonton	Attend
	Ombudsman Meetings, March, Toronto	Attend and Meet

Comments

The Language Commissioner's office has been very fortunate to participate in many activities at the regional level. The office believes there still needs to be a collective, generic approach to languages and therefore our focus has changed to ensure that.

In the past year, the office continued on with Advisory Board meetings and with its Aboriginal Languages and Cultural initiatives. The office was available for hands-on advice and support where needed to support the Legislative Assembly and its members. In addition, we provided continued support for the Chiefs and Directors. The office is quick to recognize their contributions and use of languages and roles they play to ensure languages are in the forefront and are being actively used.

Languages can be promoted by the Legislative Assembly and Languages Commissioner's office. However, it is NWT communities themselves that need to give direction to these institutions and it is because of their work that we in the NWT are leaders in the field of languages maintenance, promotion and development.

During the past year the Office of the Languages Commissioner raised its profile through attendance at many Aboriginal leadership meetings and public functions. This increased visibility has helped to raise awareness of the activities of the office and has enhanced communications with community leaders and organizations.

The office received positive feedback from community members regarding its newsletter, which is distributed to 550 organizations and individuals.

The newsletter keeps communities informed of regional language activities, pays tribute to the Elders for their contributions to language initiatives, and acknowledges major contributions to languages. Information in all major conferences, nationally and internationally, also appears in our newsletters. There were many requests for additional copies. The involvement and input of the Teaching and Learning Centres has made our newsletters a collective project.

One of the most successful projects undertaken by the communities was the translation of the national anthem of Canada into all the Aboriginal languages of the Northwest Territories. The office of the Languages Commissioner would like to thank all those participants who donated their time to this important and useful project.

We also wish to thank all those people who contributed to the Yamoria Project and assisted with the validation of our display unit. This stand-up display unit travels with the Languages Commissioner regionally, nationally and internationally. This display highlights the travel of Yamoria and his importance to the Dene people. It provides valuable information and insight into who we are as a people and into our crucial links with the land.

This was the Office of the Languages Commissioner's way of ensuring languages were kept in the forefront, are always visible, and of unifying the efforts of the language workers.

Summary of Costs

Office of the Languages Commissioner at March 31, 2004

	2003-04 Main Estimates	Actual Expenses	Commitments	Free Balance
Compensation and Benefits	153,000	91,238	0	61,762
	8,000	39,983	0	(31,983)
	$ 161,000	$ 131,221	$ -	$ 29,779
Travel and Transportation	40,000	31,836	0	8,164
Materials and Supplies	15,000	12,996	0	2,004
Purchased Services	16,000	13,031	0	2,969
Utilities	300	21	0	279
Contract Services	144,200	182,497	0	(38,297)
Fees and Payments	15,000	2,742	0	12,258
Other Expenses	5,000	462	0	4,538
Tangible Assets	0	0	0	0
Computer Hardware and Software	4,500	0	0	4,500
	$ 240,000	$ 243,584	$ -	(3,584)
Total Languages Commissioner	**$ 401,000**	**$ 374,805**	**$ -**	**$ 26,195**

APPENDIX ONE
Recommendations

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the current members of the OLC Advisory Board continue their role on the two new Advisory Boards as identified by the recommendations of the Special Committee on the Review of Languages (SCOL).

Recommendation 2

Archiving artifacts must be done with their history, explanation and the language in which it was developed.

It is strongly recommended by the Office of the Languages Commissioner that the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre role be increased and that they be given the financial resources to be able to perform the important task of archiving living artifacts.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended by the Languages Commissioner of the NWT that that the $100,000 be restored to the Legislative Assembly Language funding.

Mary Effie Snowshoe at her retirement celebration in Fort McPherson

Languages Commissioner Fibbie Tatti and Jane Charlie Sr. near Fort McPherson

Mary Teya in Fort McPherson.

Response to the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act*

Office of the Languages Commissioner

June 2004

Introduction

In 1984, federal government's attempts to amend the *Northwest Territories Act* making French and English the official languages of the NWT met resistance. NWT citizens, through the 1986 Aboriginal Languages Task Force, eloquently convinced NWT lawmakers that any legislation meant to ensure government service in specific languages and to protect their survival, had to include indigenous Aboriginal languages.

In this age, when Aboriginal people worldwide struggle against assimilation and towards preserving their own cultures and languages, the Legislative Assembly, as a young government, took bold steps to establish Aboriginal languages in landmark legislation: the NWT *Official Languages Act*. The *Act* ensures citizens government services in their own languages and commits to the preservation, development, and enhancement of NWT Aboriginal cultures and languages, a law that serves as a means for survival of Aboriginal nations.

With this first review of the *Official Languages Act* by the Special Committee on Official Languages (the Committee) now completed, we are able to celebrate language accomplishments made over the years, assess areas of weakness, revisit our vision for Aboriginal languages, and make changes that will move us forward towards the goal of language revitalization.

And we certainly have reason to celebrate. Over the years, the *Act* – combined with supporting funds for implementation – has resulted in many accomplishments. A few worth noting include:

- All across the NWT, Elders working with cultural institutes and heritage organizations, to recount and document mythologies, personal stories, history, and lifestyle, thereby developing a solid foundation for continued language development.
- Dene teachers from all language groups working cooperatively with Elders and ECE curriculum consultants to produce Dene Kede, the first NWT curriculum reflecting Dene perspective, complete with scope and sequence for cultural content and language for both first and second language situations, and directions for teaching through authentic cultural experiences.
- The creation of Aboriginal Teaching and Learning Centres (TLCs), to provide a wide range of language services in support of language education in schools.
- The creation of language communities, in recognition of the acknowledged fact that revitalization efforts should be concentrated in the home, family, and communities.

Yet in spite of these and other accomplishments, aboriginal language use continues to decline. The Committee confirms the findings released in 1999 by the NWT Literacy Council, that the successes we have enjoyed in language revitalization have not been enough to stem the tide of language loss. Language loss – or "language shift" as the term is used in the literature – is extensively discussed in the Committee's Report.

With all progress made to date, why does language shift continue? The Committee points to fundamental weaknesses in implementing language legislation, most notably the lack of a comprehensive NWT Language Plan. In the absence of this necessary Plan, we have diffused management, lowered language priorities, and minimized accountability.

It is left up to individual department to be responsible for language service delivery. So, there's a lack of comprehensive government-wide generic approach to any implementation of strategies.

The key to self-sustaining intergenerational language transmission lies in the home, family and community.

More importantly and fundamentally we need a vision of self-renewal in language. We need a vision that gives us hope and a belief in the future, that we *will* succeed in stabilizing language loss, restoring intergenerational language transmission, secure in the knowledge that our children have received the gift of their cultural identity.

Unfortunately, the view articulated by the Committee in its report is not a vision statement. It does not paint a picture. It does not provide a pathway. It does not inspire. Rather it offers merely a series of steps and processes outlining what government is going to do for language preservation and revitalization. This is neither clear enough nor good enough. Without clear vision, we are unable to see where we have to go, and to define that path with clear, measurable objectives.

Comments and Concerns

The Office of the Languages Commissioner was asked to review the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Review of the *Official Languages Act*, (SCOL) and provide any comments and concerns that we might have. In the next few pages, each of the Committee's (SCOL) recommendations is addressed by the Office of the Languages Commissioner, in turn, with most of our focus on Categories A, B and C.

Category A: To clarify and strengthen official languages legislation and policy

Recommendation A2. Dene terms to be used for Dene Languages, with advice and consent of the affected language communities.

The intent of the recommendation appeared to be to incorporate Aboriginal perspective into the *Act*. Although having included correct Aboriginal Language terminology for Aboriginal Languages is a positive step, it does not go far enough to ensure Aboriginal perspective. NWT Aboriginal persons who speak their language and who understand and respect the Aboriginal perspective should have been involved in redrafting the *Act* to ensure clear understanding of the *Act* and ensure advice and consent of language communities.

Recommendations A3, A4 and A15. Listing each Aboriginal language separately; determination of Michif as an Official Language; recognition of Aboriginal language rights

These recommendations are meant to speak to definition and criteria for establishing a language as an Official Aboriginal Language. It is important that these be established at the outset of the *Act* in order to maintain clarity and perspective throughout the Act and implementation. To gain Official language status, Aboriginal Languages must be shown to be indigenous to the NWT, that they are languages that grew out of life lived on the land. Official Aboriginal Language criteria must reflect that each Aboriginal language lies within specific geographic areas, whose boundaries reflect pre-contact, and traditional, economic, linguistic, and cultural practices of each group. Thus, the proposed amendment 14(3) should be excluded. Section 4, "Official Languages" should amended to include definition and criteria against which Aboriginal Languages in the *Act* and those being considered for inclusion can be scrutinized.

Recommendation A5. Acknowledge importance of Language Communities in Preamble.

Throughout the Report, the Committee recognizes the importance of community-based initiatives and the importance of establishing links between communities and

government. Given the sheer weight of work anticipated at community, regional, and territorial levels, a definition of "language communities" including clear lines of accountability should be included in Section 1.

Recommendation A6. Clarification of Language Rights

The Committee recognizes the *Act* is weak in defining language rights in Section 14. In strengthening definition of language rights, the Committee proposes that the *Act* apply to both the Legislative Assembly and Government of the Northwest Territories institutions, rather than government institutions alone. Perhaps, the Committee proposes this amendment to clarify that the *Act* applies only to the NWT rather than all government institutions such as the federal government. Whatever the rationale, this proposed amendment does not speak to two real problems of Section 14.

First, Aboriginal Language services are designated to regional, area, or community government offices, while English and French language services are designated to head, central, or public offices. Designating areas for specific languages may have been appropriate ten years ago; however, NWT demographics have changed. In 1999 Yellowknife had more aboriginal residents than any other NWT community: aboriginal residents accounted for 4,128 (19%) of Yellowknife's population and are projected to grow by the year 2019 to 6,917 (30%). Given changing demographics, it is appropriate that Aboriginal people living in regional centres are able to access language services in head, central, or public offices, and amendments to Section 14(2) should stipulate Aboriginal language service availability in head and central offices.

Secondly, both current *Act* and proposed Bill stipulate that citizens must prove their need for service in their language against unknown criteria of "significant demand" or "nature of the office". Persons requiring language service should not be obliged to prove need for service, especially in light of amendments proposed to strengthen government services and accountability. Placing conditions of significant demand or nature of office places responsibility for providing language service with the public rather than with the government. The proposed amendment to Section 14 should define more expansively, and positively, the circumstances in which government has a legal obligation to use and to provide services in the Official Languages.

Recommendation A7. Departments and agencies required to comply with the Act should be listed in regulation.

The Committee seeks to ensure government accountability by listing – in the *Act* – agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, offices, or other bodies, as government institutions that must comply with the *Act*. This is a very positive amendment. It is disappointing to note, however, that the Committee stresses only Occupational Health and Safety, and Health and Social Services.

All departments have important roles to play in supporting family and community-based language initiatives.

All Departments should be regulated to provide language revitalization programs and services consistent with community-based initiatives and further, prevent language funds from being used for other purposes.

Recommendation A8. Designation of a Minister responsible for the Act.

The Committee reveals that *Act* implementation is a low priority in government and seeks to address this weakness by designating one Minister responsible for Act implementation. However, we need leadership. Not just by one Minister – as the Committee has recommended – but by *all* Ministers of the Cabinet. The best way to ensure that is to assign responsibility for the *Act* to the Premier. They then become stakeholders in supporting language services.

Cabinet has been entrusted with peoples' hopes for a better tomorrow. If it becomes well known that language revitalization is a Cabinet priority under the leadership of the Premier, then communities have hope that their vision will be respected and nourished.

Recommendation A9. Establishment of an Aboriginal Languages Board through legislation.

We agree with the Committee that we need a mechanism for Aboriginal people to advise Cabinet on Aboriginal Language issues and strategies. To this end, the Committee has recommended an Aboriginal Languages Board be legislated through the *Official Languages Act*, and further, the members of such Board be nominated by their respective language communities. It should be noted that such a board already exists: the Advisory Board to the Office of the Languages Commissioner. Board members include Elders and representatives from every language community. Each Board member has lengthy experience in language work, is fluent in his/her own language, has specialized language skills, and all are highly respected for their work with languages. As we have said in the past, this Advisory Board provides the type of contact and resource needed to provide the Office and language communities with contacts, relationships with other communities, and dignity to all our work. It has drawn together language workers from all regions to hear how language organizations in their communities support each other and, most importantly, because only by working together can we gain positive results, the Board is a forum for unified work on language revitalization.

It is disappointing to note that Section 25(3), in the Proposed Bill, does not define the role of Elders on Board makeup. Elders are the backbone of the Advisory Board, for with their presence, it is ensured that all board members follow cooperative protocols in discussing issues and consensus decision-making. Elders reach back into history and help forge paths into the unknown.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner would urge the Members of the Legislative Assembly to consider the experience of the existing Advisory Board to the Office of the Languages Commissioner in forming the proposed Aboriginal Languages Board. There is no compelling reason why this could not be a joint Board since this Board already advises the Legislative Assembly through the Office of the Languages Commissioner. Indeed, here is an opportunity to build on the collective wisdom, understanding and vision that already exists in advising Cabinet.

Recommendations A11 to A14. Roles and Responsibilities of the Office of the Languages Commissioner

The Committee observes the Office of the Languages Commissioner has limited effectiveness because of weak definition of language rights, limited authority and/or lack of independence, lack of timely response from the Legislative Assembly to Office recommendations, and too broad a mandate. The Committee seeks to ameliorate these conditions by assigning promotional mandate to the proposed Official Languages Secretariat and amending the Act to ensure the Legislative Assembly responds to Office Annual Report recommendations within 180 days. These Committee recommendations are reasonable and forward looking considering proposed creation of an Official Languages Secretariat.

However it is necessary for the Office, as an institution that responds to inquiries, complaints, and invitations and monitors language preservation across the NWT, to continue functioning with an Advisory Board. With the Advisory Board, the success we have in reminding people that language rights do exist in the NWT, is reflected in the increasing number of complaints, inquiries, and invitations handled by the Office. For the first time since the inception of the Office, the number of complaints received from Aboriginal people exceeded the number of complaints received from French people, and the number of inquiries continues to rise. Operating with a joint Advisory Board as previously suggested would be a positive step and should be reflected in Act amendment Section 25.4 in the Proposed Bill in describing Aboriginal Languages Board mandate.

Recognized as a holder of high office, of equal stature to a Deputy Minister, as outlined in the current Official Languages Act, the Languages Commissioner has been invited and warmly welcomed to address many organizations important to cultural revitalization including First Nations Assemblies, the NWT Native Women's Association, college graduations, school events, Dene Nation leadership meetings, and language community meetings.

In refocusing its role as a monitor of language revitalization initiatives and a resolver of complaints and inquiries, it is essential the Office maintain its high profile as a credible agency with power to make recommendations directly to the Legislative Assembly.

Further, The Committee proposes to ensure Office third-party independence by repealing Section 19(1) and 19(2) ensuring Office independence from the public service ensuring objective analysis of inquiries, complaints, and monitoring, a welcome amendment that will serve to improve Office efficiency and effectiveness.

However, the Committee seriously compromises Office independence and credibility by recommending the Board of Management have capacity to intervene in Office procedures when the Legislative Assembly is not sitting. Even to suggest *Act* amendments include terms of dismissal of the Languages Commissioner weakens the ability of the Office to act as an independent third-party and compromises the high status and credibility of the Office. As it now stands, the Legislative Assembly through consensus, appoints the Languages Commissioner. To remove the Languages Commissioner should likewise require consensus ensuring equal support for removal as for appointment.

Further, as The Committee points out, it is essential the Office remain functional during times when the Languages Commissioner is travelling, ill, or when the Office is vacant. At times, the Languages Commissioner may be unable to serve because of personal conflict with complaints or inquiries. In 2001, the Advisory Board thoroughly discussed this issue and recommended the Office include regional staff the Languages Commissioner could appoint as Deputies or Acting Language Commissioners. The Committee's recommendation that the Legislative Assembly or Board of Management undertake the role of appointing acting Languages Commissioners during times of temporary absence interferes with the independent nature of the Office. The ability of a Commissioner or Ombudsman to appoint a Deputy or Acting Commissioner is a widely accepted procedure that maintains the Language Commissioner's independent nature and uninterrupted service.

Our hope is the Office of the Languages Commissioner is strengthened so the Office can rise to the challenge of the future where more demands will be placed on language revitalization throughout the NWT, and more Aboriginal people will seek services in their own languages. As such, it is essential the Office maintain its high status as the only institution where Aboriginal people can make their needs known directly to the Legislative Assembly.

Therefore, any recommendations that ascribe power to the Board of Management over the Office of the Languages Commissioner and conditions for dismissal, should be deleted from Act amendments.

Recommendation A16. Amend Section 29(1) to require evaluation every five years.

The intent of recommending more frequent evaluations of the Act is to establish government accountability. This is a very positive step especially in light of Committee recommendations conducting evaluation with measurable outcomes and integrating NWT Bureau of Statistics sociolinguistic surveys - a very good language revitalization tool. The 10-year review should be maintained on the scale of the review that has been conducted in the past, involving all of the communities.

Category B: To improve Official Languages management and accountability

Recommendation B1. The Minister Responsible should consider establishing a small Official Languages Secretariat by reprofiling existing resources.

The intent of this recommendation seems to be to develop a more streamlined, consolidated approach to official language matters. We think that this is a positive step. We need a higher profile for language. However, the Committee did not elaborate what is meant by 'reprofiling existing resources'. We believe that all funds for Aboriginal language maintenance and revitalization assigned to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment from the Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement – both Canada's share (Vote 4 funds) and the NWT's share (Vote 1 funds) should be transferred to the proposed Official Languages Secretariat. These funds may be assigned to programs

as proposed in the 2003-2004 Main Estimates, until such time as a comprehensive NWT Language Plan is in place to guide the re-allocation of these funds.

Recommendation B2. The Minister responsible develop a GNWT-wide Official Languages implementation plan and evaluation framework.

This is a positive recommendation, because the Office of the Languages Commissioner needs a comprehensive, integrated NWT Language Plan. Currently, there is no strong mechanism for coordination and cooperation that speaks to the priorities of each language community. However, the Office of the Languages Commissioner is concerned that the Committee may be implying the proposed Official Languages Secretariat be the focus for accountability within the GNWT. This should not discharge each each Minister and department from being individually accountable for language revitalization efforts. We all have a role to play in achieving the goals inherent in the spirit and intent of the *Official Languages Act*, and we should all be held accountable for our efforts.

"We may not be very strong as one, but we are powerful as a group. We will be very powerful when we work together."

Elizabeth Mackenzie, Dogrib Elder, Fort Rae

Recommendation B3. The Minister responsible ensure that language communities are fully consulted on the Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement action plan and evaluation framework.

Consultation with communities is a necessity to ensure a community-based approach to language revitalization that is supported by government institutions. In spite of the great amount of work accomplished, language workers have told us that revitalization efforts should be concentrated on what they could do in their own communities and not on what the government could do for them. In other words, what is going to happen in the communities is what will make a difference. Language workers need to be directly involved in developing the NWT Language Plan.

Recommendation B4. The Bureau of Statistics be tasked to prepare a language report every five years, from Census Canada, Labour Force Survey, and sociolinguistic study data.

The intent of this recommendation is to provide more data for research and development. This is a particularly important recommendation because decisions can more easily be made for targeting specific areas of concern for each language in regional language plan development, provide a basis for identifying the types of strategies required to reach the target, and again serve as a measurement of success by monitoring changes in attitudes.

Here we stress NWT sociolinguistic survey development must be grounded in current sociolinguistic research. Over the past 10 years, we have seen significant accomplishments in the field of language loss. These studies are valuable since they not

only describe different stages, they also define types of targets and strategies for focus in reversing language shift and establishing self-renewing languages.

A sociolinguistic survey consistently administered across all language groups can also serve to identify areas of common concern and allow language communities to share human and financial resources more easily. Results of these surveys serve to measure effectiveness of strategic plans and help identify areas for change in policies and programs, and ultimately the comprehensive NWT Language Plan.

Here we stress the important role of the Bureau of Statistics in administering sociolinguistic surveys. The Bureau, in consultation with the language groups, would be able to ensure accuracy first, by developing appropriate sociolinguistic measuring tools to be used consistently across regions; and secondly, by training regional surveyors in methodology for gathering accurate data.

Category C: To ensure effective and adequate financing

Recommendation C1. The Minister responsible ensure that all funding allocated for Official Languages be used for that purpose.

The intent of this recommendation is clear, and is appropriate.

Recommendation C2. Funding for Official Languages initiatives be increased as required to implement the recommendations contained in this report.

Yes, funding for Official Language initiatives should be increased, although not just to implement the recommendations contained in the Committee's report. The proposed NWT Language Plan and evaluation framework should identify the resources required to implement the components of the Plan, and every effort should be made to ensure that these financial resources are made available. If you want the language communities to undertake meaningful work, they must be appropriately compensated.

Recommendation C3. The Minister responsible take steps to ensure that the Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement is maintained and maximizes federal participation.

The intent of this recommendation is also clear, and again, is appropriate.

Recommendation C4. The GNWT enter into multi-year, flexible funding arrangements with the language communities to provide more certainty and program stability.

As the Committee notes, the intent of this recommendation is to provide certainty and stability in community-based programming. This is a worthwhile recommendation, provided the money is spent on what it's allocated for because funding for language communities has been the least secure, with most of it provided from Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement (Vote 4) funds.

However, this recommendation falls short in recognizing that language communities need not just stable funding, but more funding. Language communities access the least amount of funding available for language initiatives, often due to lengthy bureaucratic processes to secure funding.

Recommendation C5. The GNWT support language community initiatives to generate other sources of language revenue.

The Committee is recommending that language communities seek other sources of funding from charitable organizations or other donors. Although there may be substantial potential funding from other donors, these funding sources are also not secure, and require significant time in writing proposals and report writing. We would have to question whether the benefits from seeking third party funding outweigh the costs involved on already-overworked language communities staff.

Category D: To enhance Official Language service delivery

Recommendation D1and D2. "Active Offer" for Occupational Health and Safety, and Health and Social Services to be included in the Act.

A large portion of the SCOL Report is dedicated to initiating and establishing government accountability. It is important that all government departments take responsibility for implementing the Act by developing plans and services that reflect the needs identified in the NWT Language Plan, containing procedures and measures for evaluating service delivery.

Recommendation D3. Evaluate bilingual bonus directive.

The Committee recommends evaluating the bilingual bonus directive for the purpose of prioritizing and increasing the number of bilingual positions for front-line service delivery. A more effective approach would be to set in policy a clear target establishing all Official Languages as languages of government by a specific year. In Nunavut, for example, the government has in place a target that Inuktitut will be the language of government by year 2020. Meaningful results are already apparent in Nunavut and can be seen in the provision of personal official documents such as birth certificates, health cards, and driver's licences. In addition meetings conducted and documents produced by private contractors for government departments and agencies must be provided in Inuktitut as well as English.

Recommendation D4. Provide communities with basic translation equipment for government, industry, and public information meetings and gatherings.

Teaching and Learning Centre staff and language community staff are often required to provide interpreting/translating services. Therefore providing equipment is a positive step. In light of recommendations in Section I to increase Official Language use in media and technology, criteria for "basic" equipment should be matched against recommendations in Section I, for example, font and other specialized software applications. Also, transcribing equipment for cultural and language preservation should be provided to the Teaching and Learning Centres.

Recommendation D5, D6, D7. Establish pilot French language service centre for Yellowknife and a pilot Aboriginal language service centre, with evaluation after two years.

The intent of language service centres is to provide a one-window access to government language services. It is always a good idea to facilitate public access of programs and services. The Office of the Languages Commissioner supports this initiative.

Recommendation D8. Secretariat to publish regularly updated public registry of French and Aboriginal language interpreters/translators.

This is a sound recommendation in light of enhanced interpreter/translator service resulting from provision of translation equipment and language service centres. However, it is imperative that the Secretariat publicize this service, as the Office of the Languages Commissioner has viewed from many enquiries that the general public is quite often not aware of where to access interpreters/translators' services.

Category E: To build human resource capacity in the Official Languages.

Committee recommendations seek to build capacity through regionally-based training initiatives for interpreters/translators and language teachers.

Although recommendations contained in this section are positive, we must re-state that increased funds are absolutely essential and need to be a priority to build capacity in teaching and learning centres and language communities.

Category F: To support research and development for Official Languages

The Committee recommends continued research and development in the areas of terminology, language resource materials, and Geographic Place Names. We stress the importance of matching specific initiatives against the comprehensive NWT Language Plan.

As previously mentioned, over the past 10 years, there have been major accomplishments made in sociolinguistics, particularly in the field of reversing language shift. The Office of the Languages Commissioner strongly recommends that language workers be provided with sociolinguistic research results in workshops and have access to materials through a proposed clearinghouse for language materials.

Category G: To increase and improve Aboriginal language education

Recommendation G1. The Minister of ECE issue a Ministerial Directive requiring education authorities to use Aboriginal language funding for the purposes intended.

The Committee addressed this issue in Recommendation C1. Recommendation G1 would appear to be for greater clarity, and would seem to be appropriate.

Recommendations G2 and G3. The Minister of ECE clarify and strengthen implementation of Section 73.3 of the Education Act *with respect to Aboriginal language instruction in schools.*

The intent of these two recommendations would appear to be to strengthen and expand the legislative basis for Aboriginal language instruction in the schools. We would have appreciated more analysis and explanation for these recommendations. Most of the recommendations in this Section speak to projects and programs of great ambition. We have not been terribly successful in the past in making the schools the focus of language revitalization, so how do we even begin to change that around and start moving forward? The first and most important step is for ECE to ensure that their programs and projects are in synchronization with the comprehensive NWT Language Plan. This important first step would identify which ECE projects and programs are appropriate for which schools, preventing implementation of NWT-wide programs that are appropriate for only specific targets.

Recommendation G4. The Minister of ECE amend the Education Act to rebalance the authority between the Minister and education authorities with respect to Aboriginal language programming.

With this recommendation, the Committee seems to be saying that there is something amiss with the way the Minister and education authorities share responsibility for Aboriginal language programming. As stated in addressing Recommendation B2, one should not discharge each Minister and each department from being individually accountable for language revitalization efforts.

Recommendation G5. The Minister of ECE oversee the development of a comprehensive Aboriginal language arts curriculum.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner has two concerns with this recommendation. First, we already have comprehensive foundations in place for Aboriginal language arts curricula: Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit. Further, the Aboriginal Language Arts Curriculum has been established through the Western Curriculum Protocol (WCP), of which NWT is a member. Secondly, the curricula are not the problem, it is implementation, e.g., meaningful programming, resources for materials development, integration of teacher education. The Office of the Languages Commissioner would like to see the Department of Education, Culture and Employment following through on its responsibilities in Aboriginal language instruction in the schools and there needs to be a plan in place to implement the curriculum.

Recommendation G6. The Minister of ECE oversee the development of early childhood immersion programming.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner believes the intent of this recommendation is to model early childhood immersion programming on the Maori "language nests", which first started in 1981. Language nests are pre-school programs in which grandparents work with pre-school children immersing them in Maori language and culture. The Maori people of New Zealand have had great success in their language revitalization efforts, and much of their success is attributed to the introduction of language nests.

However, language nests happen outside of the home and cannot replace the family as the main means of self-renewing language. The Maori have recently established funds to support community-based language initiatives, including those which support

intergenerational language transmission. They hope to ensure early childhood language programs are linked to language initiatives conducted by families in their homes. Headstart programs that we have in the NWT are a good start for language development and immersion for children in their language and culture and would be the equivalent of the language nests models.

Recommendation G7. The Minister of ECE work...to actively recruit, train and certify Aboriginal language instructors and teachers. This task would include a review of pay scales and training/recruitment incentives.

The intent of this recommendation would seem to be to get more Aboriginal language instructors into the schools. The Office of the Languages Commissioner is glad the Committee is recommending a review of pay scales for Aboriginal language instructors, because the pay inequity in relation to other teachers has been a disincentive for recruitment into the program. We are pleased to see the word 'recruit' placed before the words 'train and certify' in the wording of the recommendation, because too often in the past, students have taken an Aboriginal teacher training program, only to have no job prospect upon graduation. This has been a disincentive for acquiring and keeping good, dedicated instructors in NWT schools.

Recommendation G8. The Minister of ECE prepare a strategic plan for Aboriginal languages...through Grade 12, including Aboriginal language instruction in core subject areas. This plan would include partnerships with language communities and the need to link language development in the school and at home.

We have addressed the first part of this recommendation in speaking to Recommendation G5, that Dene Kede, Inuuqatigiit, and WCP Aboriginal Language Arts Curriculum are already in place to provide a foundation for Aboriginal language instruction. The problem has been in following through.

As for the second part of the recommendation, we are pleased to see the Committee recognizes the need to link language development in the schools with language development at home. Experts on language shift acknowledge the key to self-sustaining intergenerational language transmission lies in the home, family and community. So it is imperative that what is being proposed for language instruction in the schools be related to, and support, community-based initiatives.

Recommendation G9. The Minister of ECE amend the Education Act *to grant Aboriginal parents the right to petition for Aboriginal immersion schooling...within language homelands, and where numbers warrant.*

The intent of this recommendation would seem to be to grant Aboriginal parents the same rights as French parents with respect to teaching of their children in the language of their choice. The wording of the recommendation is a bit vague: presumably the 'where numbers warrant' qualification would be satisfied if enough Aboriginal parents signed the petition. Or does 'where numbers warrant' mean some other population-based criteria?

Notwithstanding, the vague wording of this recommendation, setting up, staffing and operating immersion schools would be an enormous undertaking. At the bottom of page 254 of their Report, the Committee quotes Gerald Antoine speaking on the difficulties inherent in implementing immersion programs, but there is no analysis provided on this extremely important and difficult task.

Essentially, this appears to be a recommendation that is meant to provide some promise to parents. However, it is unlikely the Department of Education, Culture and Employment could hope to follow through with it, because it's difficult to attain. Parts of it may be attainable, but the scope is so wide.

Recommendation G10. The Minister of ECE work with education authorities to increase the role and capacity of TLC's to develop resource materials, and to enhance partnerships with language communities.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner is very pleased to see this recommendation in the Report. TLCs contribute a wide range of language services in support of language education in schools, and often provide language classes to parents and other community members to ensure that the language students learn at school can be reinforced in the home and community. However, they are constrained in their work because of inadequate funding. The NWT Language Plan must address this important issue.

Further, the Office of the Languages Commissioner believes that TLCs, Elders, and the language communities have worked cooperatively with education officials since inception of the *Official Languages Act*. Such partnerships are the most effective way to implement language revitalization initiatives and should be encouraged.

Recommendation G11. The Minister of ECE submit an annual report on the status of curriculum development and Aboriginal language education to the Legislative Assembly and the Aboriginal Languages Board.

This recommendation will only be effective if the Minister of ECE is held accountable – not just for submitting an annual report – but for achieving Aboriginal language education objectives. These goals and objectives should be specified in the NWT Language Plan.

Category H: To promote Official Languages

The Committee seeks to increase successful implementation of language initiatives with supportive social marketing plans. This is a sound recommendation especially in light of the proposed NWT Language Plan. A social marketing plan developed as part of a comprehensive NWT Language serves to identify specific and appropriate target groups in implementing both territorial and regional initiatives, thereby increasing likelihood for successful NWT Language Plan implementation. There also needs to be a comprehensive strategic communications plan developed.

Category I: To increase Official Language use in media and technology

The Committee recommends the GNWT expand its support for Aboriginal and French language media, through use of the internet, digital technology and emerging media technologies. The Committee also recommends ECE and other agencies support media and technology training for Aboriginal Language speakers. The Committee further recommends GNWT incorporate Aboriginal Language fonts.

As the Committee points out, although regional language workers have developed Aboriginal language fonts, there is no government department tasked with ensuring universal NWT font availability to public and government, an undertaking that would greatly improve government's ability to provide language services, and address repeated public requests for this service.

This recommendation is particularly valuable because it is a recommendation the Office can assist in implementing immediately. Over the past two years, the Office has actively worked with Dene font developers and communication technologists to fill the gap described by the Committee. Language technology development has far-reaching consequences for establishing regional interpreter/translator equipment, social marketing initiatives, Official Language documents, such as birth certificates and drivers licences, with widespread positive effect on personal, community, regional, and territorial language levels.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner looks forward to the opportunity of working with government agencies in implementing this very important recommendation.

Summary

With the advice and guidance of the Advisory Board, the Office of the Languages Commissioner has come to understand that the *Official Languages Act* is a promise from the lawgivers to the people that Aboriginal Languages will survive forever as vibrant, living languages. It is my sincere hope that the *Act* be strengthened, so that lawmakers can live up to that promise, and leave the legacy of languages to future generations. The world is too narrow a place if people believe that different languages – worlds if you will – have no place. Language is culture and culture is who you are. And the world is a very much smaller place when a language is lost.

Here is a government that takes responsibility for achieving our vision of self-renewal in language. This government gives us hope and a belief in the future, that people *will* succeed in stabilizing language loss, restoring intergenerational language transmission, secure in the knowledge that our children have received the gift of their cultural identity.

There is enough incentive and direction from the people to act on this vision. How is this going to be achieved?

There is a saying: "By living with a child your hands will stretch into the future." For the grandparents it ensures that their knowledge, skills, and values will live on in new generations. For the young people, the nurturing and loving relationship will give them a strong sense of identity and self-worth. – ***The Elders***

- By designating the Premier of the Northwest Territories as the Minister responsible for the implementation of the *Official Languages Act*;
- By ensuring, through regulation, that all Departments of the Government of the Northwest Territories are accountable to their respective Minister, to provide language revitalization programs and services consistent with community-based initiatives;

- By creating an Official Languages Secretariat, with sufficient resources to exercise a meaningful role as the government's focal point for Official Language matters;
- By creating an Aboriginal Languages Board, including Elders as key members, with the capability to advise not only the Cabinet, but the Legislative Assembly directly; and to consider the experience of the existing Advisory Board to the Office of the Languages Commissioner in forming the proposed Aboriginal Languages Board;
- By taking a systemic approach to language revitalization, beginning with the development of a comprehensive, integrated NWT Language Plan, that speaks to the priorities of each language community;
- By encouraging all departments and institutions of the Government of the Northwest Territories to accept responsibility for language revitalization efforts; and introducing stronger accountability measures to ensure that they do; and
- By recognizing that the Office of the Languages Commissioner is an important component of a systemic approach to language revitalization; so much so that its roles and responsibilities should be strengthened – not reduced.

APPENDIX TWO

Summary of Vote 1 and Vote 4 Allocations 2003-2004

Provided by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Total GNWT Official Languages Funding for 2003-2004 (Votes 1 and 4)

Aboriginal Languages		**Vote 4**	**Vote 1**
Agreement Evaluation		$ 44,000	$ 44,000
Teaching and Learning Centres		$ 475,000	$ 0
Beaufort-Delta DEC	$ 85,000		
Deh Cho DEC	$ 84,000		
Dogrib DEC	$ 72,000		
Sahtu DEC	$ 63,000		
South Slave DEC	$ 62,000		
YK 1 DEA	$ 36,000		
YK 2 DEA	$ 35,000		
Conseil Scolaire francophone	$ 38,000		
Aboriginal Language and Cultural Instructor Program		$ 196,000	$ 0
Aboriginal Language Broadcasting		$ 175,000	$ 222,000
Interpreter/Translator Training Program		$ 20,000	$ 0
Language Planning		$ 25,000	$ 0
Language Promotion		$ 15,000	$ 0
Language Resource Development		$ 0	$ 0
Geographic Place Names		$ 15,000	$ 0
Terminology Development/Language Workshop (H&SS)		$ 35,000	$ 0
Language Communities Total	$ 1,343,000	$ 900,000	$ 443,000
Chipewyan	$ 153,000		
Cree	$ 82,000		
Dogrib	$ 243,000		
Gwich'in	$ 162,000		
Inuvialuktun	$ 242,500		
North Slavey	$ 151,000		
South Slavey	$ 224,500		
Other	$ 85,000		
Language Acquisition Initiative		$ 0	$ 919,000
Early Childhood Initiative		$ 0	$ 898,000
Literacy – official languages (from $2.4M Literacy Initiative)		$ 0	$ 300,000
Cultural Projects		$ 0	$ 66,000
Language Services Section – Administrator		$ 0	$ 251,000
Aboriginal Language School Programs Total		$ 0	$ 6,696,000*
Beaufort-Delta DEC	$ 1,705,000		
Deh Cho DEC	$ 877,000		
Dogrib DEC	$ 893,000		
Sahtu DEC	$ 863,000		
South Slave DEC	$ 1,274,000		
Dettah DEA	$ 75,000		
YK 1 DEA	$ 549,000		
YK 2 DEA	$ 394,000		
Conseil scolaire francophone	$ 66,000		
Total for Aboriginal Languages		**$ 1,900,000**	**$ 9,839,000**

* See attached note regarding funding for Aboriginal language school programs.

Information provided by ECE

Total GNWT Official Languages Funding for 2001-2002 (Vote 4)

French Language		**Vote 4 only**	**(no Vote 1)**
Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement for French and Aboriginal Languages			
ECE	Agreement Evaluation	$ 88,000	
	GNWT French Translation Services	$ 315,000	
	Services to the Public	$ 50,000	
	Policy and Coordination	$ 110,000	
	Language Promotion	$ 15,000	
	Community Funding (PDCC)	$ 145,000	$ 723,000
Justice	Legal Translation Services	$ 425,000	
	Services to the Public	$ 32,000	$ 457,000
H&SS	Policy and Coordination	$ 40,000	
	Services to the Public	$ 27,000	
	Services to the Public (Health Boards)	$ 165,000	$ 232,000
Executive	Services to the Public		$ 6,000
Finance	Services to the Public		$ 2,000
FMBS	Services to the Public		$ 4,000
Legislative Assembly	Services to the Public		$ 15,000
MACA	Services to the Public		$ 12,000
NWT Housing corporation	Services to the Public		$ 10,000
Public Works and Services	Services to the Public/Office Space		$ 86,000
RWED	Services to the Public		$ 25,000
Transportation	Services to the Public		$ 15,000
Workers' Compensation Board	Services to the Public		$ 12,000
NWT Power Corporation	Services to the Public		$ 1,000
Special Project: Promotion of Language (FFT)			$ 30,000
Special Project: Project Coordinator (AFCY)			$ 48,645
Total			**$ 1,678,645**
Canada-NWT Agreement for French Language Education			$ 1,266,000
Total Funding for French			**$ 2,944,645**

Information on Vote 1 and Vote 4 funding provided by Education, Culture and Employment.

Information provided by ECE

APPENDIX THREE

Office of the Languages Commissioner's response to the Report of the Special Committee on the Review of the Official Languages Act.

LEGAL OPINION TO THE OFFICE OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER ON HOW THE AMENDMENTS TO THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT MAY CHANGE THE OFFICE OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

A. DECREASED RESPONSIBILITY

Perhaps the most obvious change to the Office of the Languages Commissioner is a reduction in the responsibilities of the Languages Commissioner. Section 20 of the Act read:

> "20. (1) It is the duty of the Languages Commissioner to take all actions and measures within the authority of the Languages Commissioner with a view to ensuring recognition of the rights, status and privileges of each of the Official Languages and compliance with the spirit and Intent of this Act in the administration of the affairs of government institutions, including any of their activities relating to the advancement of the aboriginal languages in the Territories."

With the amendments, the words "including any of their activities relating to the advancement of aboriginal languages in the Territories" are struck out. Essentially, the amendments decrease the responsibility of the Languages Commissioner by taking away the promotional mandate and placing it with the Minister Responsible for Official Languages. At recommendation A9 in the GNWT response to the final SCOL report, it states:

> "Under the new model, the promotional role will be moved to the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board. The Office of the Languages Commissioner would continue to have an independent monitoring role and would continue to report to the Legislative Assembly."

There are advantages and disadvantages to the legislative change:

Advantages

* The change allows the Languages Commissioner to concentrate fully on complaints. This is a very important function.

* It results in the Languages Commissioner being in a more independent position. In essence, the Languages Commissioner is not working with the government to obtain resources and promote languages, and at the same

time, criticizing the government for failing to comply with its legislated mandate.

Disadvantages

* Along with a decrease in responsibility may come downsizing of the Office of the Languages Commissioner. Having reviewed the floor plan for the 1st floor of the Laing Building, it would seem to suggest that the government is looking at a smaller office space and possibly fewer personnel. In all, this would likely result in less prominence of the Office. While the government certainly had the ability to downsize the Office of the Languages Commissioner, there may be a number of ramifications to such a move. If the Office exists to protect language rights and to ensure the public is well served in accordance with the *Official Languages Act*, then any decrease in the Office's visibility is unacceptable.

* With a decrease in responsibility, it could result in a part-time Languages Commissioner. This may make the position of Languages Commissioner less appealing to many qualified persons, and the job may not attract the same calibre of individual.

B. Replacing the Advisory Board with an Aboriginal Languages Revitalizing Board

In October 2000, the Languages Commissioner established an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board was established to provide the Languages Commissioner with expert advise on language issues in the various communities of the Northwest Territories. With the legislative amendments, the Advisory Board will be dissolved and replaced with an Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board, which is established in the amended Act. Its functions would be very similar to that of the Advisory Board.

There are advantages and disadvantages to the legislative changes:

Advantages

* The Advisory Board is not established or protected in the legislation. The Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board is established and protected in legislation, and its role is defined. This should help ensure the ongoing existence of the board to deal with aboriginal language issues.

Disadvantages

* There will undoubtedly be numerous issues surrounding the organization and structure of the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board that were not addressed in the SCOL final report or the amendments (i.e. who are members of the respective language communities?; structure of

meetings; reporting to the Minister). These are significant issues that need to be addressed if the Board is to have any authority and be effective.

* Revitalization Board. The Advisory Board reports to the Languages Commissioner, who has the role to be critical of government action. The members of the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board may be leery of criticizing the Minister who appointed them.

* If the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board is not effective, for whatever reason, and if the recommendations in Part B of the SCOL final report (official languages management and accountability) are not fully developed, then there will be few, if any, active measures taken to promote official languages within the Northwest Territories. Right now, at least we know the Languages Commissioner is doing some important work.

C. Reporting Relationship with the Government

Under the old Act, the Languages Commissioner was appointed by the Legislative Assembly for a period of four years during good behavior. The Languages Commissioner could be removed by the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories on the advice of the Legislative Assembly. With the amendments, these same types of provisions continue to apply. However, section 18(3) states that when the Legislative Assembly is not sitting, the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories may suspend the Languages Commissioner for cause or incapacity on the recommendation of the Board of Management. Further, the Commissioner can then appoint an interim Languages Commissioner on the recommendation of the Board of Management.

As you are aware, the Board of Management is comprised of the Speaker of the House and appointed Members of the Legislative Assembly. It is understood that legislators may want some provision to deal with suspension and interim replacement of the Languages Commissioner when the Legislative Assembly is not sitting. However, there are ramifications to allowing the Board of Management to fulfill this role.

With the amendments giving even greater power to the Board of Management, the Board could suspend and replace the Languages Commissioner. While the suspension would only be on an interim basis, the Board could then use its influence over other Members of the Legislative Assembly to terminate the Languages Commissioner upon next sitting of the Legislative Assembly. Concerns of such political interference could make it almost impossible for the Languages Commissioner to do his or her job. The Language Commissioner must always be seen as being independent and free to criticize government action or inaction.

CONCLUSION

It is likely that the amendments to the *Official Languages Act* will result in downsizing of the Office of the Languages Commissioner: less authority; and possibly greater political interference. All of this may result in a less effective Office.

Final Thoughts

> *"It's a shift in the focus of what we used to do. There is nobody out there, I think, that has as much experience as you have, in terms of leadership for languages. One of the things that we've always talked about is that our language is our language. It is up to us to determine what it's going to be. We can't have people out there telling us – this is what we think your language should be. I think the people themselves have to say – this is what our language is to us. This is how the* Act *can best serve us"*
>
> ***-- Fibbie Tatti, addressing the Advisory Board members on their role***

When appointed to this position, I believed the most important task was to raise the profile of the Office of the Languages Commissioner, so that language workers, Elders, and public knew the Office existed because the *NWT Official Languages Act* existed. It was important to describe both the nature and function of the Office. As our Year One (2000-2001) Business Plan showed, most people interviewed in plan development were aware the Office existed but most were unaware of Office roles, responsibilities, and powers. Very few were familiar with details of the *Act* itself. Here was a tremendous opportunity to remind the public about history and hopes expressed in the 1986 Aboriginal Language Task Force while ensuring to the public that all powers ascribed to the Languages Commissioner would be exercised in upholding the *Act*.

This Office has been very successful in raising the profile of language issues in the communities. We have successfully gathered together an Advisory Board of Elders and language workers from every Official Language group that revitalized and brought language issues to the forefront.

In absence of Official Language government services – clearly described in the Committee's Report – the Office of the Languages Commissioner became a source of information for a wide range of language inquiries. In refocusing its role as a monitor of language revitalization initiatives and a resolver of complaints and inquiries, it is essential the Office maintain its profile as a high and credible agency with power to make recommendations directly to the Legislative Assembly.

My hope is the Office of the Languages Commissioner is strengthened, so the Office can rise to the challenge of the future where more demands will be placed on language revitalization throughout the NWT, and more Aboriginal people will seek services in their own languages. As such, it is essential the Office maintain its high status as the only institution where Aboriginal people can make their needs known directly to the Legislative Assembly.